

**[EXPLAINING] FROM WHOSE PERSPECTIVE THE CONVENTIONAL IS A TRUTH AND NOT A TRUTH**

English: conventional truth / relative truth / obscurational truth / truth for a concealer

Sanskrit: *Samvṛti Satya*

Tibetan: ཀུན་ལྡན་བཤེན་པ། - *Kuen-Dzob Den-pa* (*Kuen* = thoroughly/everything/all, *Dzob* = conceal/

obscure/hide, *Den-pa* = truth/reality)

In general, the Sanskrit term *Samvṛti* (and thus the Tibetan term *Kuen-dzob*) has several meanings. However, in the context of the phrase *Samvṛti Satya* or *Kuen-dzob Den-pa*, the word *Samvṛti* or *Kuen-dzob* means "concealer". Here concealer refers to the ignorance that conceals the actual nature of phenomena.

That type of ignorance is a delusion (bewilderment) that acts to hinder or obstruct sentient beings from viewing the ultimate nature of phenomena. Even though phenomena do not exist inherently, it superimposes the characteristic of inherent existence onto those phenomena – a characteristic phenomena do not possess. Therefore, since it conceals the real nature of phenomena, it is a "concealer". The Sanskrit term for *Samvṛti* also connotes "obstructor", for it obstructs the truth.

Here *Satya* or *Den-pa* (truth) refers to conventional truths such as pots, pillars, etc. that are truths for *Samvṛti* or *Kuen-dzob*, i.e. the concealer ignorance.

This explanation captures the meaning of the following stanza from the ***Descent to Lanka Sutra***

*The production of things [exists] as Samvṛti;  
Ultimately it has no nature.  
That which is mistaken with respect to [ultimately] having no nature  
Is asserted to be a Samvṛti of truth.*

The meaning of *Samvṛti* in the first line of the stanza and the meaning of *Samvṛti* in the fourth line of the stanza are not the same. In the first line *Samvṛti* refers to conventional truths, such as things being produced, etc. In the fourth line it refers to the concealer, i.e. the concealing ignorance that apprehends inherent existence and *relative to the perspective* of which things exist truly and inherently.

However, even though conventional phenomena are posited in dependence on the concealer ignorance, this does not mean that a consciousness apprehending, for instance, the pot to exist inherently also posits the pot or *the existence* of the pot. The pot is merely posited as *a truth* to that concealing ignorance because the pot is a truth in the perspective of that awareness. The concealing ignorance does not posit the pot or the existence of pot because that which is posited by such a mind does not exist even conventionally.

Chandrakirti says in his ***Supplement to the Middle Way***:

*Since delusion obscures the nature it is Samvṛti;  
That which is fabricated by it appears as true,  
This is described by the Sage as [worldly] Samvṛti Satya.  
The fabricated entities are [mere] Samvṛti.*

Blue and so forth are fabrications that are fabricated by the delusion *Samvṛti* (the concealer) that grasps at true existence. Thus, those fabrications or conventional truths appear as truths to sentient beings. Since those conventional phenomena are truths *relative to the perspective* of the mistaken, worldly *Samvṛti* (concealer) the Buddha described them as "worldly *Samvṛti Satya*" or "truths for worldly concealers". In this way *relative to the perspective* of those who have not overcome the concealer ignorance yet, conventional phenomena are *truths* but not conventional truths (or "truths for a concealer").

However, if conventional truths are considered "truths for a concealer" on account of being misperceived by ignorance, then how are they viewed by sentient beings who have overcome such ignorance?

There are three types of sentient beings who have overcome or eliminated ignorance:

- 1) Hearer Arhats
- 2) Solitary Realizer Arhats
- 3) Bodhisattvas who have reached any of the three pure bhumis (the eighth, ninth or tenth bhumi)

Those three are referred to as "the three beings" for the sake of brevity.

Hearers and Solitary Realizers realize emptiness (conceptually and in dependence on a correct reason) at the latest on the 'middling' Hinayana path of accumulation. They reach the Hinayana path of preparation when they generate a mind that is a union of calm abiding and special insight taking emptiness as its object. Once they cultivate a meditative equipoise that realizes emptiness *directly* they reach the Hinayana path of seeing. On the Hinayana path of seeing, while realizing emptiness directly, Hearers and Solitary Realizers eliminate the *intellectually acquired* ignorance and all the delusions that are induced by that ignorance. After they have eliminated the intellectually acquired ignorance etc. and when they again enter into the meditative equipoise realizing emptiness directly, Hearers and Solitary Realizers reach the Hinayana path of meditation. On the Hinayana path of meditation they gradually eliminate the *innate* ignorance and the other delusions that are induced by innate ignorance. They repeatedly enter into the meditative equipoise (realizing emptiness directly) and each meditative equipoise eliminates one of the levels of innate ignorance etc., starting with the coarsest level. When Hearers and Solitary Realizers have eliminated the *subtlest* level of innate ignorance etc. they reach the Hinayana path of no-more-learning, and become Arhats. (See CHART 06)

Bodhisattvas also realize emptiness (conceptually and in dependence on correct reasons) at the latest on the 'middling' Mahayana path of accumulation. They reach the Mahayana path of preparation when they generate a mind that is a union of calm abiding and special insight taking emptiness as its object. Once they cultivate a meditative equipoise that directly realizes emptiness they reach the Mahayana path of seeing. On the Mahayana path of seeing, while realizing emptiness directly, Bodhisattvas eliminate the *intellectually acquired* ignorance and all the delusions that are induced by that ignorance. After they have eliminated the intellectually acquired ignorance etc. and when they again enter into the meditative equipoise realizing emptiness directly, Bodhisattvas reach the Mahayana path of meditation. On the Mahayana path of meditation, from the first until the seventh Bodhisattva bhumi, they repeatedly enter into the meditative equipoise (realizing emptiness directly) in dependence on which they gradually eliminate the coarse and subtle levels of the *innate* ignorance and all the delusions that are induced by that ignorance. On the eighth bhumi of the Mahayana path of meditation Bodhisattvas have eliminated innate ignorance etc. and thus reach Nirvana (the cessation of ignorance and of the delusions induced by ignorance). During the last three pure bhumis and when absorbed in the meditative equipoise (directly realizing emptiness) they gradually eliminate the coarse and subtle *imprints* of the intellectually acquired and innate ignorance and the coarse and subtle *imprints* of the delusions that are induced by the two types of ignorance. Having overcome the *subtlest* imprints of the two types of ignorance and the *subtlest* imprints of the delusions that are induced by the two types of ignorance, the Bodhisattvas become fully enlightened Buddhas. (See CHART 06)

Even though the various awarenesses of the three beings are still affected by the appearance of the inherent existence of phenomena, none of them *apprehends* phenomena to exist inherently. None of the three beings' awarenesses *apprehends* phenomena to exist inherently anymore, because the three beings have eliminated the concealer ignorance. Therefore, fabrications or conventional truths are not truths but *mere* conventionalities *relative to the perspective* of those three beings. *Relative to the perspective* of those three beings conventional truths are mere conventionalities because even though they appear to them to exist inherently they do not apprehend them to exist in this way.

For instance, the reflection of a face in a mirror is a truth or a non-deceptive phenomenon *relative to the perspective* of those who have not learned yet that the reflection of a face in a mirror is not a face. However, relative to the perspective of those who have understood that the reflection of the face is not a face, the reflection of a face is not a truth but a deceptive phenomenon. *Relative to the perspective* of those people the reflection is a deceptive phenomenon because even though it appears to them to be a face they do not apprehend it *to be* a face.

However, even though *relative to the perspective* of those three beings conventional phenomena are mere conventionalities this does not mean that *relative to the perspective* of those three beings conventional phenomena are not conventional truths or "truths for a concealer". Those who have overcome afflictive ignorance realize that conventional phenomena are truths for the ignorant consciousnesses of *other* beings. Furthermore, they also remember how conventional phenomena previously appeared to their own ignorant awarenesses. Therefore, *relative to the perspective* of the three beings, conventional phenomena are both, conventional truths and mere conventionalities.

